

What has the administration's response to this problem been?

Deafening silence.

The Higher Education Act is up for reauthorization. Yet this administration has put forward no real plan to make college more affordable.

The Bush administration has stood by while States have slashed their education budgets and raised college tuition to close State budget shortfalls.

The President's oversized tax cuts have eaten up Federal resources that we could otherwise invest in higher education, and in basic research and investment.

Despite his repeated promises to increase the value of the average Pell Grant, the President's proposed budget for next year freezes the Pell Grant for the third year in a row.

The President's budget also cuts the Perkins Loan program—the Federal work-study program that has helped tens of millions of middle- and lower-income students work their way through college.

I hope we can come up with a better answer, and many of us have proposed one.

We believe the Government can, and must, create an opportunity society, where every college-ready student or worker who needs to update his or her skills has the chance to go to college, or get additional training, without having to take on back-breaking debt to do it.

We want to increase the maximum Pell Grant from \$4,050 to \$5,100, to double the HOPE Scholarship tax credit from \$1,500 per student to \$3,000 per student, and to make the education tax credits refundable.

We also support efforts to help more African American, Hispanic, Native American, and other minority students attend college, because diversity strengthens our democracy and our economy.

James Michener fought in World War II. He helped win perhaps the greatest battle of the last century.

Americans in the 21st century will fight different battles. But the stakes are just as high.

We need to make sure that every son and daughter of America has the chance to go to college if he or she can do the work. It is not just a matter of individual self-interest. In a real sense, it is a matter of our national survival.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 90 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee, and the second half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee.

The Senator from Indiana is recognized.

Mr. LUGAR. Mr. President, I will use 8 minutes.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is recognized for 8 minutes.

DIPLOMATIC NOMINEES

Mr. LUGAR. Mr. President, I rise to address the body this morning on the importance of Senate action to confirm pending nominations for ambassadorial and other foreign affairs posts.

Together, Republicans and Democrats on the Foreign Relations Committee have worked to move nominations as expeditiously as possible. During the past few weeks, the committee has held hearings and considered nominations for more than 30 such posts. As a group, these nominees received bipartisan support. Our members voted unanimously in favor of confirmation of each one at a business meeting last Thursday.

I was pleased last night when the Senate confirmed Paul Applegarth to be chief executive officer of the Millennium Challenge Corporation. I appreciate the work of Senator FRIST and Senator DASCHLE to move this important nomination. The launch of the Millennium Challenge Corporation presents an important opportunity for the United States to enhance the effectiveness of its development assistance. Last year, Congress appropriated \$1 billion for the MCC, and having a chief executive officer in place and ready to provide leadership in this new enterprise is a vital first step to ensuring its success.

I hope the Senate will now move with some dispatch on the rest of the pending diplomatic nominees. The posts for which these individuals have been nominated hold great importance for our country. A few examples will illustrate that point.

Among the nominees pending before the Senate is that of John Negroponte to be U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. As I said at Ambassador Negroponte's nomination hearing, the post will be one of the most consequential ambassadorships in American history. The Ambassador to Iraq not only will be called upon to lead an estimated 1,700 embassy personnel—that is, 1,000 Americans and 700 Iraqis—he will be the epicenter of international efforts to secure and reconstruct Iraq and provide the developing Iraqi government with the opportunity to achieve responsible nationhood.

American credibility in the world, progress in the war on terrorism, relationships with our allies, and the future of the Middle East depend on a positive outcome in Iraq. What happens there during the next 18 months almost certainly will determine whether we can begin to redirect the Middle East toward a more productive and peaceful future.

The stakes for the United States in achieving success in Iraq could not be higher.

I understand there is leadership activity that may make it possible for the ambassadorship of John

Negroponte to be considered by the Senate very soon. I very much appreciate that effort.

The pending nominees also include individuals to be ambassadors to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone, each of which is struggling in the aftermath of ethnic conflict. They include nominees to be ambassadors to Poland, Romania, and Slovenia, at a time when these countries are joining the European Union and looking to deepen their ties to the United States. They include nominees to be ambassadors to Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen at a time when the United States must improve its relations and encourage democracy and reform in the greater Middle East. They include also nominees to be ambassadors to important regional anchors, such as Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa, and South Korea.

The ambassadorial nominees currently awaiting Senate confirmation would represent the United States in countries with a collective population of more than 700 million people.

Foreign governments notice when U.S. ambassadorships to their countries go unfilled for lengthy periods of time. An ambassadorial absence can be read by some nations as a sign of declining American interest. The United States needs strong and effective diplomatic representation abroad to ensure cooperation in the fight against terrorism, to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to build trade and investment relationships that will strengthen our economy and advance freedom and democracy worldwide.

We also must remember that ambassadorships function not only as representation of the United States, but as managers of their embassies. Given that U.S. diplomatic missions have been terrorist targets and remain the most visible American symbol in many countries with a terrorist presence, we need leadership at these embassies. Needless depriving an embassy of its ambassador in a time of terrorist threat may have consequences as grave as depriving a military unit of its commander in time of conflict.

Over the years, the Senate generally has done its duty to efficiently move ambassadorial nominees. We should proceed carefully and thoughtfully when we evaluate diplomatic nominations. But we should proceed with dispatch. Nominations must not be delayed by inattention, bureaucratic arguments, or political motivations, and when our examinations are complete, we should send the nominees to their post as quickly as possible.

I am confident the Senate understands the importance of confirming nominees who will be on the front lines of efforts to advance U.S. interests around the world, and I ask all Members to join the Foreign Relations Committee in moving these nominees. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MURKOWSKI). The Senator from Missouri. How much time does the Senator yield to himself?

Mr. BOND. Ten minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized for 10 minutes.

HIGHWAY BILL FILIBUSTER

Mr. BOND. Madam President, I am on the Senate floor to explain why I am on the floor today. A week ago, I came to the Senate floor to raise what I think is a very serious point, and that is, we are being filibustered on the procedural motions to take the highway bill to a conference with the House.

I had the great privilege and pleasure back in January of 2003 to assume the chairmanship of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the Environment and Public Works Committee, and I did so knowing full well that committee, along with the full committee, had the responsibility for drafting what I consider to be one of the most important infrastructure bills this Congress ever deals with, and that is the transportation bill or, as it is known by some, the highway bill. This year we are calling it SAFETEA. This is the acronym adopted by the administration to emphasize the fact that it is a safety-related measure.

Good highways, roads, and bridges, along with mass transit and other elements, are vitally important to our country in a number of ways. For those of us who are stuck in traffic around Washington, DC, being stuck in traffic is like having breakfast in the morning, and it is as reliable as flowers in the springtime. Better roads mean less congestion, less hassle. But there are many other items that are very important as well, because good roads and the lack of congestion mean less pollution. Cars sitting idling pollute the atmosphere, so the atmosphere is worse, the air quality is worse if you have congestion.

Highways are also important in another way. If we had passed the highway bill last winter or even when we passed it in February, we would have put people to work because every billion dollars of highway investment creates 47,000 jobs, and there is no question that we were waiting to see the jobs come back. We needed these highway jobs this year. We have missed this year's construction season.

Fortunately, the tax cuts passed by this body are working, and we are seeing an upturn in the economy, particularly in small business. That is another speech I will make on the Senate floor.

Tremendous numbers of people are going to work, as small business members, as proprietors starting their own businesses, 410,000 working selling their own products on e-Bay. They are creating good jobs. But we still need the jobs.

Beyond that, good highways and good transportation are essential for the long-term stability and growth of our

States, our communities, and our Nation.

When I was Governor, I spent a lot of time working on economic development issues, and there is one thing I can tell you: if you are trying to get jobs into a particular community, they have to have transportation, particularly if they are dealing with goods or with people who are coming into that community. Good roads mean good jobs. Our highways, our roads, our bridges, even our waterways are the sinews of economic commerce. Without good transportation, we do not have growth and we don't have jobs.

Finally, good highways mean safety. We kill about 43,000 people on the highways in the United States every year. The Department of Transportation says about a third of those killed are killed because of insufficient highway infrastructure. In other words, we have in Missouri many crowded two-way highways which have traffic that really demands a divided highway. When you have that, you have frustration, and very often people from out of State are not familiar with the curves and the hills and pass in areas where you cannot pass, and they have tragic head-on collisions. I say we kill roughly three people a day on Missouri's highways, and I think one out of three is killed because of inadequate highways. All you have to do is travel the highways and see the white crosses where people have died.

To deal with that situation, I set out to work on a bipartisan basis. We have worked since a year ago January very closely with all the interested parties—the people interested in road building, community development workers, union members, environmental groups who wanted to have improved environmental processes. We brought all of them together in a bipartisan—let me emphasize bipartisan—bill for which I have thanked my colleagues on the other side many times for their great cooperation. We brought a good bill to the floor: \$255 billion for highways and bridges over the next 6 years. Boy, we passed it with a whopping 76-vote majority in the Senate.

I go home and people say: What is happening to the highway bill?

I say: It is being filibustered.

They say: What? It passed by 76 votes.

I say: No, the simple procedural steps to move the bill to conference with the House are being filibustered.

They say: What?

I say: Yes, there are about six steps that have to be taken to send a bill to the House of Representatives so we can sit down in a conference and get a final bill that has to then pass both Houses and go to the President.

We have been working for more than a year and a half. It has been more than 7 months since the existing bill, TEA-21, expired. It has now been 7 weeks since the Senate passed a highway bill. It has now been 5 weeks since the House passed a highway bill. The

majority leader and I have gone to the Senate floor and asked unanimous consent three times to take the necessary steps to move the bill to the House.

All three requests have been objected to by my colleagues on the other side. Yesterday, a great group of citizens from the community of Saint Joseph, MO, was in my office. They traveled a long way to ask me: Why do we not have a highway bill? I told them I wish I had a reasonable answer, but I do not.

Last Friday, I went to Kansas City, MO, where we had the road-building group together and that was the union leaders, the contractors, the community development people, the local elected officials, and they gave me a stack of 43,000 signatures on petitions saying pass this bill. Unfortunately, my suitcase was not big enough and the restrictions made it difficult for me to bring it here with me, but if my colleagues want to see them we will bring 43,000 signatures to the floor to show how many Missourians want a highway bill.

They asked me why we have not even begun the process of meeting with the House. There is no good reason, except politics, and that is not a good reason.

Every single day someone asks me these questions, and now I ask my colleagues once again why can we not start a highway bill conference? Some on the other side say they demand to know what is going to come out of the conference. I would love to know what is going to happen tomorrow. I would love to know what is going to happen the day after tomorrow. No one can say with certainty what is going to come out of any conference.

This is too important a bill to be a political football. We passed a total bill of \$318 billion. The House passed one for a total of \$275 billion. We passed a much better bill. I want to see our bill passed. I want to see \$318 billion. I want to see the environmental streamlining in the bill that allows the environmental concerns to be raised early on in the process and dealt with, that makes it easier to do the planning.

The House bill had \$11 billion worth of specific earmarks. My colleagues probably read about it in the editorial pages. Now, the occupant of the chair may take great pride in the fact that some of those were in a far northwest State, but I say to my colleagues we are not going to be able to take a bill that has \$11 billion of earmarks that take away from the general allocation of funds among the States. So that is something we have to negotiate, but we need to do that to get a good bill.

I cannot speak for the folks on the other side as to why they are willing to kill the bill. They will not even let us go to conference to try to get the bill that we passed. They have to be banking, I guess, on perhaps a cynical notion that the American people will understand or they will just blame Republicans, even though it is their side currently undertaking to kill the legislation.